

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-67101-0 - Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education: Issues, Challenges and Solutions

Claire McLachlan, Tom Nicholson, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, Louise Mercer and Sarah Ohi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education

Issues, challenges and solutions

*Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education* provides a comprehensive introduction to literacy teaching and learning. The book explores the continuum of literacy learning and children's transitions from early childhood settings to junior primary classrooms, and then to senior primary and beyond.

Reader-friendly and accessible, this book equips pre-service teachers with the theoretical underpinnings and practical strategies and skills needed to teach literacy. It places the 'reading wars' firmly in the past as it examines contemporary research and practices. The book covers important topics such as literacy acquisition, family literacies and multiliteracies, foundation skills for literacy learning, reading difficulties, assessment, and supporting diverse literacy learners in early childhood and primary classrooms. It also addresses some of the challenges that teachers may face in the classroom and provides solutions to these.

Each chapter includes learning objectives, reflective questions and definitions of key terms to engage and assist readers. Further resources are also available at [www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/literacy](http://www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/literacy). Written by an expert author team and featuring real-world examples from literacy teachers and learners, *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education* will help pre-service teachers feel confident teaching literacy to diverse age groups and abilities.

**Claire McLachlan** is Associate Professor, Early Years Education, at Massey University.

**Tom Nicholson** is Professor of Literacy Education at Massey University.

**Ruth Fielding-Barnsley** is Associate Professor in Literacy Education at the University of Tasmania.

**Louise Mercer** is Lecturer in Learning and Professional Studies at the Queensland University of Technology.

**Sarah Ohi** is Lecturer in Language and Literacy Education at Deakin University.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-67101-0 - Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education: Issues, Challenges and Solutions  
Claire McLachlan, Tom Nicholson, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, Louise Mercer and Sarah Ohi  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-67101-0 - Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education: Issues, Challenges and Solutions

Claire McLachlan, Tom Nicholson, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, Louise Mercer and Sarah Ohi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education

Issues, challenges and  
solutions

---

Claire McLachlan

Tom Nicholson

Ruth Fielding-Barnsley

Louise Mercer

Sarah Ohi

---



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-67101-0 - Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education: Issues, Challenges and Solutions

Claire McLachlan, Tom Nicholson, Ruth Fielding-Barnsley, Louise Mercer and Sarah Ohi

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107671010](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107671010)

© Cambridge University Press 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013

Cover design by Marc Martin at Lanz+Martin  
Text design by Tanya De Silva-Mckay  
Typeset by Newgen Publishing and Data Services  
Printed in Singapore by C.O.S. Printers Pte Ltd

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*A Cataloguing-in-Publication entry is available from the catalogue of the National Library of Australia at*  
[www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)

ISBN 978-1-107-67101-0 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at [www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/literacy](http://www.cambridge.edu.au/academic/literacy)

**Reproduction and communication for educational purposes**

The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of  
one chapter or 10% of the pages of this work, whichever is the greater,  
to be reproduced and/or communicated by any educational institution  
for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution  
(or the body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to  
Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) under the Act.

For details of the CAL licence for educational institutions contact:

Copyright Agency Limited  
Level 15, 233 Castlereagh Street  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Telephone: (02) 9394 7600  
Facsimile: (02) 9394 7601  
E-mail: [info@copyright.com.au](mailto:info@copyright.com.au)

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

# Contents

List of figures	x
List of tables	xi
About the authors	xii
Acknowledgements	xiv
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
Our theoretical framework	4
Myths and legends of literacy teaching	9
What this text covers	10
A few words on how to use this book	14
 <b>PART 1: LITERACY ACQUISITION: THE CHILD, THE FAMILY AND DIVERSITY IN THE MODERN WORLD</b>	 <b>17</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERACY ACQUISITION IN THE EARLY YEARS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE</b>	<b>19</b>
Looking back: a brief history of literacy in the early years	20
The reading wars	25
How do children gain essential literacy skills? A psycholinguistic perspective	27
Social practice perspectives on literacy acquisition	29
A sociocultural perspective on literacy acquisition	32
Conclusion	33
<b>CHAPTER 3: WHEN SHOULD CHILDREN START LITERACY LEARNING?</b>	<b>35</b>
Overview	36
Precocious readers	36
What is the ‘right’ age at which to learn to read?	39
Teaching babies to read	42
When is the best time to teach children to read?	42
Conclusion	46
Appendix	47
<b>CHAPTER 4: FAMILY LITERACIES AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CENTRES AND SCHOOLS</b>	<b>48</b>
What is family literacy?	49
Literacy in the home setting	50

Contents

	Helping families to support children’s literacy achievements	56
	Engaging families in children’s literacy learning	60
	Conclusion	63
<b>CHAPTER 5:</b>	<b>MULTILITERACIES: GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION OF READERS</b>	<b>65</b>
	What are multiliteracies?	66
	A new generation of readers: skills and abilities of children in the new millennium	68
	Thinking about technology and teaching for the next generation of learners: multimodal approaches	72
	Multiliteracies in schools: some examples	76
	Conclusion	80
<b>CHAPTER 6:</b>	<b>DIVERSE CLASSROOMS AND LEARNING IN BILINGUAL AND MULTICULTURAL/MULTILINGUAL SETTINGS</b>	<b>82</b>
	Diversity: what does it mean?	83
	Indigenous Australian students	87
	Differentiated instruction	88
	Another face to diversity: students who are different in terms of how you might teach them	93
	Conclusion	96
<b>PART 2</b>	<b>LEARNING ABOUT LITERACY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>CHAPTER 7:</b>	<b>EFFECTIVE PRACTICE AND THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN SUPPORTING LITERACY</b>	<b>101</b>
	High-quality literacy environments: what are they and how can you create one?	102
	Literacy in the curriculum: Te Whāriki and the Early Years Learning Framework	107
	The role of teachers: knowledge calibration and effective teaching of the very young	112
	Access <i>and</i> mediation: making the most of a literacy-rich environment	114
	Conclusion	119
<b>CHAPTER 8:</b>	<b>‘SOUND’ FOUNDATIONS FOR LEARNING LITERACY</b>	<b>121</b>
	A starting point	122
	Phonological awareness	122
	Alphabet knowledge	126

Contents

	Vocabulary	128
	Comprehension	133
	Writing	135
	Continuity between home and centre literacy learning	137
	Conclusion	138
<b>CHAPTER 9:</b>	<b>USES OF ASSESSMENT BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER TRANSITION TO SCHOOL</b>	<b>140</b>
	Setting the scene for assessment	141
	Learning to use assessment wisely	142
	Assessment before and during a child’s transition to school	146
	Methods for assessing and documenting children’s developing literacy skills and strategies	148
	Conclusion	156
<b>PART 3</b>	<b>LITERACY LEARNING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>CHAPTER 10:</b>	<b>THE FIRST YEAR OF PRIMARY SCHOOL: BUILDING ON FOUNDATIONS</b>	<b>161</b>
	The importance of the transition to primary school	162
	Exploring issues during the transition from early childhood to primary	162
	The important role of the early childhood educator in the transition process	169
	The important role of the primary school teacher in the transition process	171
	Children’s ongoing language and literacy development – a crucial period	173
	Recommendations for the construction of the initial reading and writing program	174
	Building partnerships between the teacher, child and the family	177
	Literacy assessment: developing records of the child’s literacy development	178
	Key understandings about children’s literacy learning in the early years of school	181
	Conclusion	185
<b>CHAPTER 11:</b>	<b>ESTABLISHING A COMMUNITY OF READERS</b>	<b>187</b>
	Strategies for cooperation	188
	How do you set up your own reading program?	191

Contents

	Teaching in small groups	194
	Creating a community of readers	196
	Teaching beginning reading	197
	Phonemic awareness	204
	Conclusion	205
	Appendix	207
<b>CHAPTER 12:</b>	<b>USES OF ASSESSMENT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL YEARS</b>	<b>209</b>
	The roles of assessment during the primary school years (assessment <i>for</i> , <i>as</i> and <i>of</i> learning)	210
	The roles of self-assessment within the assessment process (assessment <i>for</i> and <i>as</i> learning)	212
	Accountability (and accountability for <i>what</i> in the assessment <i>of</i> learning)	213
	The key domains of literacy assessment	214
	Methods for assessing and documenting pupils' developing literacy skills and strategies	216
	Conclusion	233
<b>CHAPTER 13:</b>	<b>READING AND WRITING IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL: FOCUS ON NARRATIVE WRITING</b>	<b>234</b>
	Setting the scene	235
	What are pupils interesting in reading?	236
	How do you hook your class into reading?	237
	Reading books to the class to create a community of readers	238
	Why is it so hard to write stories?	239
	Looking at exemplars of writing: what is it that makes the writing effective?	242
	The reciprocal relationship between reading and writing	245
	Teaching about the structure of stories	246
	Conclusion	249
<b>PART 4</b>	<b>LITERACY LEARNING IN THE SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>CHAPTER 14:</b>	<b>EXTENDING READING AND WRITING IN THE SENIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL: FOCUS ON FACTUAL WRITING</b>	<b>253</b>
	What are the issues?	254
	Challenges in teaching writing skills, especially for factual writing	256



Contents

What writing targets or ‘standards’ should we expect of pupils at each year of school?	257
Strategies for teaching students how to read and write factual texts	262
Writing in the classroom: some examples of turning mathematics problems into writing	265
How can teachers build vocabulary for comprehension in the senior primary school?	267
Attitudes to reading	270
Attitudes to writing	272
Conclusion	273
Appendix	275
<b>CHAPTER 15: STRUGGLING READERS: ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS</b>	<b>276</b>
The origins of reading failure	277
Emotional and behavioural disorders	282
Dyslexia – what is it and what can teachers do about it?	283
Challenges for families and other concerned parties	287
Conclusion	290
<b>CHAPTER 16: CONCLUSION</b>	<b>292</b>
What is different about this book?	293
What have we tried to explain in the book?	294
Concluding statement	302
References	303
Index	327

# List of figures

2.1	Dorothy Harrow’s <i>School Journal</i> , Part 1, nos. 1–3, nos. 5–9, 1911, pp. 12–13	23
2.2	Progressive Primer, Book 3, pp. 12–13	23
2.3	Janet and John, <i>I Went Walking</i> , pp. 12–13	24
2.4	Ready to Read reader, <i>The Fire Engine</i>	25
3.1.	A comparison of reading levels of children in New Zealand and the United States	43
3.2	A comparison of reading levels for below-average and above-average reading groups in New Zealand and the United States	44
4.1	Sénéchal’s home literacy model	53
4.2	Family strengths model	58
5.1	The New Learning Environments curriculum framework, including pedagogical cycle	75
6.1	<i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> – old and new diets	90
7.1	Cover of the Te Whāriki curriculum document	108
7.2	Cover of the Early Years Learning Framework curriculum document	110
8.1	Phonological awareness continuum – early part	123
10.1	A typical school-day timetable	165
10.2	Framework for the construction of a literacy program	175
10.3	Child’s alphabet chart	181
11.1	Setting up a reading classroom	192
11.2	The colour wheel in the Ready to Read series	197
11.3	Skills-based teaching – scope and sequence	207
12.1	Relationships between oral and written receptive and expressive languages	216
13.1	‘School Dog’s Big Mistake’ story web	248
13.2	‘The Monster and the Mice’	248
14.1	Percentage of students at or above the reading standards in 2010	255
14.2	Percentage of students at or above the writing standards in 2010	256

# List of tables

1.1	Structure and audience for chapters in this text	14
5.1	Dimensions of ICT use in teaching and learning	74
7.1	Structural and process features of quality	106
7.2	Mediation of literacy	117
7.3	Features of high-quality literacy-rich classrooms	118
8.1	Scope and sequence of phonological instruction	126
10.1	Engaging strategies and activities	183
12.1	Assessment types, purposes and audience	211
14.1	Reading by year level	275
14.2	Writing by year level	275

# About the authors

**Claire McLachlan** is Associate Professor, Early Years Education, at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. Claire became involved with early childhood education through the Playcentre movement as a young mother of three children, and became fascinated with how young children learn. She completed her doctorate on the topic of emergent literacy in New Zealand kindergartens. She has lectured on early childhood education at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, Wisconsin; at AUT University in Auckland; and at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. As well, she has had various roles as a teacher and manager in early childhood centres. Claire has a longstanding interest in literacy and has written and edited a number of publications on teachers’ beliefs and practices as they relate to literacy in the early childhood curriculum. She is the co-author of *Early Childhood Curriculum: Planning, Assessment and Implementation* and the co-editor of *Literacies in Childhood: Changing Views, Challenging Practice*. Since 2006 she has also been the co-editor of the journal *Early Education*, which is a publication aimed at early childhood practitioners.

**Tom Nicholson** is Professor in the School of Education at Massey University in Auckland, New Zealand, where he has been working since 2006. At Massey, he served as co-director of the Centre for Research on Children’s Literacy (CERCL) from 2007 to 2010. The Minister of Education appointed him to an Expert Advisory Group of four assessment experts during 2010–11. His current research focuses on issues related to reading acquisition, reading difficulties and reading comprehension. He is also investigating whether interventions can bridge the gap between social classes in reading achievement, and stopping the summer slide in reading. Prior to coming to Massey, Tom held a personal chair in Education at The University of Auckland. His initial appointment was with the School of Education at Waikato University in Hamilton. He has been active in professional organisations, especially the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading and the International Reading Association. In 2009 Professor Nicholson won election to the Hall of Fame of the International Reading Association. He has written and co-edited several books about research and practice, including *Reading Comprehension: The What, the How, and the Why* (2012), *Dyslexia in the Workplace* (2012), *Teaching Reading Vocabulary* (2010), *Teaching Text Structures: The Key to Non-fiction Reading Success* (2007) and *At the Cutting Edge: The Importance of Phonemic Awareness in Learning to Read and Spell* (2005). He has served on the boards of educational research journals such as *Reading and Writing*, *Reading Research Quarterly*, *Scientific Studies of Reading* and *The Reading Teacher*. Professor Nicholson received his BA in English and history, and his MA in history from the University of Sydney, after which he taught high school in Sydney for several years, and then joined the Research and Planning Branch of the Department of Education in South Australia. He went

About the authors

on to complete his PhD in Reading Education at the University of Minnesota. He has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of Texas at Austin, Stanford University, and the University of Tasmania, Australia.

**Ruth Fielding-Barnsley** is Associate Professor of Literacy Education at the University of Tasmania, Australia. Prior to coming to UTAS two years ago, Ruth was lecturing in special education at Queensland University of Technology. Ruth began her interest in literacy as a primary classroom teacher in New South Wales and followed this up by completing degrees in special education and a PhD on the topic of developing a model of reading acquisition. Ruth has published several journal articles and book chapters in the area of literacy and she has also contributed to the development of the Australian Curriculum as both a writer and advisor. Her proudest achievement has been the development of a smartphone app to teach phonemic awareness, ‘Profs’ Phonics in 2012.

**Louise Mercer** is Lecturer in the School of Learning and Professional Studies at Queensland University of Technology. Prior to taking up this position in July 2007, she was a regular classroom teacher, a compensatory language teacher, a support teacher and a school psychologist (kindergarten to Year 12) in a number of school districts in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada. She was also a sessional lecturer at the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, BC) where she completed her doctorate in 2004 and at Simon Fraser University (Burnaby, BC). Louise has published several journal articles and book chapters in the area of learning difficulties, autism and reading difficulties.

**Sarah Ohi** is Lecturer in Language and Literacy in the School of Education, Faculty of Arts/ Education at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. She is passionate about improving language and literacy practices for children in their early years of life. Sarah lectures in Language and Literacy for the Early Childhood and Bachelor of Teaching programs at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Her doctoral research explored constructions of reading in the early childhood years and teachers’ roles in the research–policy–praxis nexus. Sarah’s research interests largely revolve around improving the language and literacy development of young children, improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education through innovations and the use of technology, and strengthening the research–teaching nexus by engaging in research with practising teachers in the field. Sarah is currently engaged in further language and literacy research which will be reported in upcoming research articles.

# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the production team at Cambridge University Press and in particular, our Commissioning Editor, Isabella Mead. We are sincerely grateful to Isabella for her unflagging support and assistance as the team of authors for this text was assembled and negotiated and for her very helpful advice on processes and feedback on the draft chapters. This book would not have eventuated without Isabella’s help and input.

Claire McLachlan would like to thank ‘the Smith kids’ and their families – Jessica Smith and James Edwards, Jeremy Smith, Lorraine Farrell, and Tegan and Brad Smith – for supplying photographs of her grandchildren Millie and Vaughn and great niece Amber involved with literacy activities at home. May these beautiful children have a lifelong love of literacy! Thanks to Elizabeth Henry, Massey University librarian, for her assistance in finding exemplars of early reading books. Thanks to the Ministry of Education for permission to print an extract from *The Fire Engine*. Finally, Claire would like to thank her wonderful husband, Simon Barton, for his loving support and tolerance throughout the research and writing of ‘yet another little project’.

Tom Nicholson would like to thank Sara Strasser, teacher at Chavez Elementary in downtown Chicago, for allowing the use of photos of her class. Thanks to Dr Laura Tse for allowing use of the lesson plans taken from her PhD thesis. Thanks to the New Zealand Ministry of Education for permission to reprint materials from the National Standards in Reading and Writing publication; the cover page of Dot Meharry’s book, *The Hole in the King’s Sock*; and the images of the ‘colour wheel’ from the Ministry’s website. Thanks to Dot Meharry, author. Thanks to Dinah Winiata for the lesson plan in Chapter 8. Thanks to Wiley publishers for permission to print the phonics scope and sequence from the *Phonics Handbook*. Thanks to Wendy Pye Publishing for allowing use of the cover of *The Watchdog Who Wouldn’t*. Thanks to Ruth Fielding-Barnsley for allowing use of one of the poster images from her Sound Foundations program, and for her wise feedback on Tom’s writing. Finally, but most importantly, Tom thanks his wife, Nora, who gave up precious summer holiday time so he could write chapters for the book – it was a lot to ask but really appreciated.

Ruth Fielding-Barnsley would like to thank Jo and Joel Stewart for sharing photos of their wonderful children, Alex and Clare.

Louise Mercer would like to thank all the teachers in her life, especially the pre-service teachers at the Queensland University of Technology who have so enthusiastically engaged with her in learning about how to support young people experiencing difficulties with reading and writing.

# Acknowledgements

Sarah Ohi is thankful to the Lord for all things. She dearly thanks her husband Piliati Ohi and her children, Joseph, Glen and Leah, for their ongoing love, support and patience. Thanks to Piliati for his unfailing encouragement, to Glen and Leah for the inclusion of their special photo and to Joseph for his ICT support. Sarah would like to thank Claire McLachlan and Tom Nicholson for their leadership and the invitation to join the team on this project. Thanks also to the other co-authors for their collegiality. Sarah thanks her parents, Mele Tufuola and Andrew Cunningham, for introducing her to books and supporting her during her own transition to primary school. She would also like to thank her extended family for sharing photographs of their beautiful children, Alyssa, Saraya and Leanna Ohi, who are all enjoying a positive start to their literacy learning journeys.

The authors would also like to thank their employing organisations, secretarial staff and colleagues for their support while this book was written: Massey University, the University of Tasmania, the Queensland University of Technology and Deakin University.

We are grateful to the following individuals and organisations for permission to use their material in *Literacy in Early Childhood and Primary Education*. **Page 5, 129, 133:** Courtesy Tegan Smith; **7, 8:** Courtesy Jessica Smith; **10, 52, 54, 69, 70, 127:** Courtesy Lorraine Farrell; **25:** *The Fire Engine*, published by New Zealand School Publications Department, copyright © Crown, 1963; **53:** From Neuman & Dickinson *Handbook of Early Literacy Research* vol. 3, 2011. Reproduced with permission from Guildford Publications, Inc.; **74** (table 5.1): © Commonwealth of Australia 2002. Reproduced, communicated and adapted with permission of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2012; **84, 281:** Courtesy Jo Stewart; **90:** Cartoon by Nicholson from *The Australian*, [www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au](http://www.nicholsoncartoons.com.au). Reproduced with permission; **106** (table 7.1), **118** (table 7.3): From Justice, Block & Vukelich *Achieving Excellence in Preschool Literacy Instruction*, 2007. Reproduced with permission from Guildford Publications, Inc.; **108, 192, 197, 242, 243:** Cover of *Te Whāriki*, Image and Text from *Reading in Junior Classes*; Colour Wheel; Cover of *The Hole in the King's Sock*; Material from *National Standards Reading and Writing*. Reproduced by permission of the publishers, Learning Media Limited, PO Box 3293, Wellington, New Zealand. Copyright © MoE, 1996; 1985; no record of colour wheel first pub. date; 2001; 2009, respectively. **110:** *Belonging, Being & Becoming – The Early Years Learning Framework*, Commonwealth of Australia (2009). [http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy\\_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx](http://www.deewr.gov.au/EarlyChildhood/Policy_Agenda/Quality/Pages/EarlyYearsLearningFramework.aspx). Reproduced with permission; **163, 169, 181, 185:**

Acknowledgements

Courtesy Sarah Ohi; **173**: Courtesy Yvette Sini; **189, 190**: Courtesy Sara Strasser, Chavez Elementary School, Chicago; **204**: From T. Nicholson *Phonics Handbook*, pp. xv–xvi. Melbourne: Wiley. Reproduced with permission; **248** (bottom): Ruth Fielding-Barnsley; **268**: *The Watchdog Who Wouldn't*, Galaxy Kids Paperbacks, Wendy Pye Publishing Limited, 2003. © Sunshine Books. Reproduced with permission.

*Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright. The publisher apologises for any accidental infringement and welcomes information that would redress this situation.*